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ABSTRACT

Prior to 1975, children with disabilities had no federally guaranteed right to public education. In 1975, Congress passed public law 94-142, which guaranteed that all students regardless of their handicapped condition be taught in the least restrictive environment. In 1990, it was re-named the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). Teachers College, Columbia University, has developed a course for general education teachers to address challenges to including students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. The course promotes a view of diversity in the classroom that includes students with disabilities. It examines prejudices that center around culture, race, gender, poverty, medical issues, and disabilities. The course concentrates on strategies to teach students to accept all individual differences. It also focuses on the concept of cooperative learning, which allows students to work with peers toward shared academic goals. Each student in the course is assigned a child with disabilities who is currently enrolled in a self-contained classroom. Working with the child's teacher and school administrator, the student plans a strategy for including the child in a regular classroom for the upcoming academic year. The course brings together all that is studied during the term and turns theory into practice. (Contains 12 references.) (SM)

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INCLUSION: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS AND THE IMPACT ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

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In terms of life's experiences nothing can compare with the birth of a child. Be you parent, aunt, cousin, sibling or grandparent, the excitement of a new life being brought into the world cannot be surpassed. One of the first milestones that is immediately discussed is that of the first day of school. What school will the child attend? Will the teacher be a stimulating, caring educator? Will the child like school and do well academically? So many questions and so much excitement accompanies the birth of a baby.

Five years pass quickly. The first day of school arrives and although you realize that your child has a disability, you hurry to school so that your child will not be late on the first day. However, instead of welcoming you and your child you are taken to a small room and asked to wait. Why aren't you and your child being escorted to a classroom with the other children. There is excitement in the air and lots of laughter among the students. Finally a stern looking woman opens the door and tells you that they have no classroom for your child. The school doesn't educate students like your child. You are shocked. Your child doesn't understand what is happening. The officious women tells you that you can send your child to another city to the state institution for children such as yours or you can keep your child at home with no education or training provided. Somehow you stumble out the door of your neighborhood school---the one your tax dollars support. You call the school board and realize that in fact you have no right to an education for your child.

Prior to 1975 children with disabilities had no federally guaranteed right to public education.. The choices for the parents were limited to state institutions which were residential or the child could be kept at home. A tutor or child care provider would have to be hired at great expense to the family or a family member would have to assume primary, custodial care of the child. The family would then lose this wage earner's potential monetary contribution to the family. All the while this family is paying taxes to support their local school district. The basic premise of these federal decisions was the belief that children with disabilities would not and could not benefit from education and that their presence in school would have a negative impact on the other students.

In 1975 the 94th Congressional Congress of the United States of America passed a public law (94-142) guaranteeing the education of all students regardless of their handicapping condition. This law came to be known as the Education for All Children Act (EACHA). In 1990

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it was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). The stated purposes of the IDEA are to

> *assure that all children with disabilities have available to them within the time periods specified...a free appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs; to assure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents or guardians are protected; to assist States and localities to provide for the education of all children with disabilities; and to assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities. (20 U.S.C. Section 1400[c])*

Alper et al. (1995) provide a clear summary of the major implications of IDEA which dictates how learners with disabilities are identified, assessed, placed, and taught:

1. Special education services suitable to the needs of the disabled student must be provided at no cost to the student or family.
2. Parents must receive written notification prior to the school's conducting a case study evaluation that may determine eligibility for special education services.
3. Individualized, comprehensive, and nondiscriminatory assessment must be provided for the purpose of identifying the learner's unique characteristics and needs.
4. An individualized educational program (IEP) must be developed annually for students with disabilities. The IEP must contain a statement of current performance levels, annual goals, and short-term objectives, specific services to be provided, extent of participation in regular education settings, projected date for initiation of services, expected duration of services, objective criteria, and evaluation procedures.
5. An individualized family service plan (IFSP) must be provided to children with disabilities who are 3 to 5 years of age. The IFSP must contain the child's current performance levels, family strengths and weaknesses, anticipated outcomes, necessary services, time lines for initiating and completing services, the name of the service manager, and methods for transitioning the child to appropriate services.
6. An individual transition plan (ITP) must be included with the IEP's of adolescents and young adults. The ITP is developed with the assistance of community-based vocational rehabilitation personnel. It complements the IEP by adding skills and services needed to support the transition from school to work.
7. Beyond specific educational services, students with disabilities are entitled to receive necessary related services. These include developmental, corrective, and other support services needed for the child or youth to benefit fully from the educational program. They may include transportation, counseling, medical evaluation, and physical, occupational, and recreational therapy.
8. Educational services must be provided in the least restrictive setting appropriate to the student's educational characteristics.
9. Finally, parents and guardians are entitled to due process when disputes regarding the appropriateness of the educational program occur. (pp.8-9)

One of the main tenets of PL94-142 is the goal of educating children in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The IDEA provides for procedures to ensure that individuals with disabilities are guaranteed the right to interact to the "maximum extent" possible in the least restrictive environment with children who are not disabled. On a continuum of educational settings with a hospital or institution being the most restrictive placement, the general education classroom is the least restrictive option. This act, therefore, established the concept of educating students with disabilities in general education settings as one of the prevailing philosophical goals. Hence the professional development of teachers who will be in general education classrooms takes on significance as children with special needs enter the mainstream.

Teachers College, Columbia University has developed a course to address these challenges. In addition to examining the theories of inclusion, this course seeks too change the attitudes and prejudices of students training to be regular education teachers toward students/individuals with disabilities. While some studies report that individuals perceive people with disabilities positively, the majority of studies indicate that students who do not have disabilities demonstrate negative attitudes toward their peers who do; this often results in social rejection (Roberts & Zubrick, 1992). Likewise a study by Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher,and Saumell (1996) found that for teachers the lack of professional preparation and a desire not to teach those with special needs were barriers to inclusion. Most participants in the study felt that inclusion would interfere with the learning of all of the students.

Educators who demonstrate attitudes and behaviors that show they are comfortable with individual differences are critical to creating a classroom environment that is accepting of diversity (Huntze,1994). The classroom teacher is the key role model in projecting the inclusive and accepting atmosphere necessary for all children to learn and grow socially and academically. The first step in this course then is to have each student examine his/her feelings and past experiences dealing with issues of diversity. The language one uses in referring to a student, for example, is an area that is discussed in depth. The teacher, as the role model must avoid any language that has a negative connotation so as not to impart prejudicial attitudes toward students with disabilities and therefore, lower their self-esteem or negatively influence the other students. Person first language is to be used; e.g., student with mental retardation not mentally retarded person. Nielsen (1997) suggests the following words are to be considered inappropriate and are to be avoided: *handicapped, deformed, diseased, burdensome, spastic, incapacitated,* and *disadvantaged.*

This course is unique in that it promotes a radical view of diversity in the classroom. Not only are those students with disabilities thought to be included in the classroom framework all students are included. We examine prejudices that center around topics such as culture, race, gender and gender preference, poverty and medical issues such as AIDS . The changes in American society in the past fifty years have had a tremendous impact on schools and the students they educate. Society has been reshaped as a result of such factors as economic conditions, demographic shifts, racism, sexism, changes in the structure of families, and increases in substance abuse, child abuse, exposure to violence, and suicide. These factors have contributed to producing a society that places the social health of its children in jeopardy (Davis,1993) and increase the likelihood that students who are not disabled may experience difficulties in school, be referred for and placed in special education settings, and drop out of school. " For students with

identified disabilities, these factors often interact with the disability to place students in double jeopardy within the educational system. As a reflection of society, schools have been called upon to respond to these societal changes and meet the needs of increasingly diverse groups of students who challenge the existing school structure to change." (Salend,1998)

The second phase of this course concentrates on strategies to teach students to accept these individual differences. Until the classroom teacher can in some way experience the diversity the students present, she/he will not be effective in creating an inclusive classroom. For that reason a number of simulation exercises are used, as well as guest speakers from diverse backgrounds and films. Classroom discussions and reflective writings are used to personalize this information. The underlying key is to understand the different aspects of ourselves that we bring to social interactions and to celebrate these differences. In this way we build a sense of community in the school and the classrooms; we expect differences, we celebrate diversity and we work together for everyone's benefit.

The third area of emphasis in this course focuses on the concept of cooperative learning. Most classrooms are highly competitive on an individual level. This new approach strives to introduce a classroom philosophy in which students work with their peers toward a shared academic goal. To reinforce this concept, this course is taught using the precepts of cooperative learning. Stevens and Slavin (1995) researched the effect of using cooperative learning strategies on mainstreamed students with learning disabilities. They concluded that cooperative learning can be singled out as an effective approach to instruction, and is a "highly effective tool" for successful mainstreaming of students with learning disabilities. A particular advantage of the cooperative learning model was seen to be the involvement of students in the management of the classroom. This resulted in freeing up teacher time for work with individual students. Likewise Roach et al. (1983) studied the effects of peer tutoring: Students in special education classes tutored "other low achieving students" in regular secondary math classrooms. Peer tutoring was found to improve standardized test achievement scores of the "mildly handicapped students" more than did traditional instruction, working alone in class, or working in pairs. In 1985 Maheady and Sainato examined the effects of peer tutoring on social status and social interaction of high and low status elementary students. Tutors and tutees worked in the regular classroom as other students did seatwork nearby. Peer tutoring resulted in increased academic gains for tutees. Tutoring of a low status peer by a high status student improved the social standing of the low status student without detracting from the high status student. Sharp, York and Knight (1994) addressed the concern of various educators that inclusive education will have a negative impact on the learning of regular students. The authors investigated whether test scores of regular students decline with inclusion, and whether behavior problems increase. The findings of this study did not indicate any decline in the academic or behavioral performance of regular education students in inclusive classrooms compared to those in non-inclusive settings.

Most courses are taught based on the readings of different theories. While this course examines theory, it puts it into practice and makes it meaningful on a personal level for the students training to be general education teachers. Each student in this course is assigned a child with disabilities who is currently enrolled in a self-contained classroom. Working with the child's teacher and school administrator, the student plans a strategy for including the child in a regular

classroom for the upcoming academic year. This exercise brings together all that is studied during the term and turns theories into practice.

The attitudes of the classroom teachers are the key to the success of inclusion and the promotion of students being included in the least restrictive environment. Witness teachers in Bunch and Valeo's study (1998) who said they believed inclusion to be an "evil plot hatched by the government and administrators to cut expenses at the cost of teachers". However, another teacher in this study said, "Inclusion is sound practice because it works. It works for that particular student. It works for the parents. And it can work for the teacher as well. It can work for everyone".

YOUR BROTHER'S FACE

An old Indian chief was standing night watch with his young braves. The braves asked the chief how they would know when the night was over and the dawn had fully broken. "Can we be sure night is over", they asked, "when we can tell the difference between a cow and a sheep on that hill over there?"

"No", said the chief.

"Will we know the night is over when we can see the color of the bird on the branch of a tall tree?"

"No", he said.

"Well, then, how can we know?"

The chief answered, "You will know that the night is over when you look into the face of the man next to you and see your brother".

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